

IN THE CLAIMS:

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~striketrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1. (currently amended) A transaction supporting apparatus for use by an intermediary agent in supporting payment of a transaction made between a buyer and a seller, said apparatus comprising:

issuing means for issuing a membership number to the buyer upon a first purchase of any product using the intermediary agent;

sending means for sending the membership number of the buyer to a delivery service agent who delivers the product to the buyer;

receiving means for receiving credit card information about a credit card account of the buyer via the delivery service agent upon delivery of the product to the buyer, only once the first time the buyer uses the intermediary agent for payment for a purchase;

registering means for registering the credit card information of the buyer received via the delivery service agent, together with the membership number of the buyer;

payment information notifying means for notifying the buyer of payment information that requests the buyer ~~including information about a bank account of the seller into which the buyer is requested to transfer money to a bank account of the seller~~ by other means than the registered credit card account of the buyer before a specified deadline expires, in response to which the buyer may transfer money to the bank account of the seller by means other than the registered credit account of the buyer;

payment confirming means for confirming whether the requested money transfer of the buyer has been made by the other means than the registered credit card account to the seller's bank account by the specified deadline; and

charging means for charging the buyer by the intermediary agent for the transaction via the credit card account identified from the credit card information registered together with the membership number of the buyer, only if said payment confirming means finds that the requested money transfer to the seller's bank account by the other means than the registered credit card account has not been made by the deadline.

2. (previously presented) The transaction supporting apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising means for sending to the buyer a reminder message which reminds the buyer of payment when the payment confirming means confirms that payment has not been made by the deadline,

wherein said charging means charges for the transaction via the credit card account of the buyer when a given period described in the reminder message has expired.

3. (Original) The transaction supporting apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising means for remitting to the seller an amount obtained by subtracting a given service fee from an amount paid by the buyer.

4. (canceled).

5. (previously presented) The transaction supporting apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising means for initiating a money transfer from a specified bank account of the buyer to the bank account of the seller, wherein said charging means charges for the transaction via the credit card account if said payment confirming means finds that said bank account of the buyer does not have a balance sufficient for the payment to be made by the buyer.

6. (previously presented) The transaction supporting apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising means for requesting the delivery service agent to deliver the product purchased by the buyer and notifying the delivery service agent of information about the buyer, said information about the buyer including an address of a delivery destination.

7. (currently amended) A method for use by an intermediary agent of supporting payment of a transaction made between a buyer and a seller, said method comprising the steps of:

issuing a membership number to the buyer upon a first purchase of any product using the intermediary agent;

sending the membership number of the buyer to a delivery service agent who delivers the product to the buyer;

receiving credit card information about a credit card account of the buyer via the delivery service agent upon delivery of the product to the buyer, only once the first time the buyer uses the intermediary agent for payment for a purchase;

registering the credit card information of the buyer received via the delivery service agent, together with the membership number;

notifying the buyer of payment information that requests the buyer ~~including information about a bank account of the seller into which the buyer is requested to transfer money from the buyer's account before a specified deadline expires;~~ confirming whether the requested money transfer has been made to the seller's bank account by the specified deadline, in response to which the buyer may transfer money to the bank account of the seller by means other than the registered credit account of the buyer; and

charging they buyer by the intermediary agent for the transaction via the credit card account identified from the credit card information registered together with the membership number of the buyer only if it is found that the requested money transfer to the seller's bank account has not been made by the deadline.

8. (currently amended) A computer-readable recording medium storing a program for use by an intermediary agent for supporting payment of a transaction made between a buyer and a seller, the program causing a computer to function as:

issuing means for issuing a membership number to the buyer upon a first purchase of any product using the intermediary agent;

sending means for sending the membership number of the buyer to a delivery service agent who delivers the product to the buyer;

receiving means for receiving credit card information about a credit card account of the buyer via the delivery service agent upon delivery of the product to the buyer, only once upon the first purchase by the buyer using the intermediary agent for payment;

registering means for registering the membership number and the credit card information of the buyer received via the delivery service agent;

payment information notifying means for notifying the buyer of payment information that requests the buyer ~~including information about a bank account of the seller into which the buyer is requested to transfer money~~ to a bank account of the seller by other means than the registered credit card account of the buyer before a specified deadline expires, in response to which the buyer may transfer money to the bank account of the seller by means other than the registered credit account of the buyer;

payment confirming means for confirming whether payment of the requested money transfer of the buyer has been made to the seller's bank account by the specified deadline; and

charging means for charging the buyer by the intermediary agent for the transaction via

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the credit card account identified from the credit card information registered as associated with the membership number of the buyer only if said payment confirming means finds that the requested money transfer to the seller's bank account has not been made by the deadline.

9-10. (canceled)